

**Parks and Recreation Division Report
August 2023**

PROGRAMMING

Story and Play

Story & Play has once again been a summer staple for many families with young kids. Weekly, we see around 100 people or more coming out to enjoy this partner program with the Duluth Public Library. Story & Play takes place in a new park each Monday morning from 9:30 a.m.-noon with one Saturday program per month.



Pop-Up Splash Pad

Our first Pop-Up Splash Pad of the year was a great success at Morgan Park. This is our second summer of Pop-Up Splash Pads and more than 300 people showed up to cool off, run in our sprinkler set up, and enjoy the park. This year we are hosting Pop-Up Splash Pads at Morgan Park, Grant Park, Keene Creek Park, and Portman Park.



Superior Hiking Trail: The Duluth Edition

We have completed four hikes of the ten-hike series, traveling the entire Superior Hiking Trail within Duluth. Participants meet at the end point of the hike and are shuttled to the start. Two Recreation Instructors lead the hikes, offering teachable moments along the way. We have had 10 people per hike consistently so far, and everyone has had a great time.

Pop-Up Play

Each week, Parks and Recreation goes to a different park for two days, bringing a trailer full of games and activities to enhance the park experience. In July, we visited Portland Square, Merritt Park, Morgan Park, Observation Park, and Riverside Park. Anywhere from 15-40 people attend on a regular basis.

Athletics

It has been a busy summer on the athletics side in Parks and Recreation. We have partnered with the St. Scholastica women's golf team to offer an Intro to Golf program at Enger Golf Course for 18 participants ages 6-12. We offered a second summer league for adult ultimate frisbee at Irving Park which attracted 65 participants. We are utilizing six pickleball courts on Monday nights at Wheeler Athletic Complex for an adult pickleball league, with 47 people playing over 12 weeks. We are also partnering with the Duluth Figure Skating Club for a nine-week Develop Skills to Skate program at Heritage Center for 32 kids ages 5-10.



Mountain Biking

On July 22, we hosted a Learn to Ride Signup Event at Morgan Park. Five kids ages 9-13 learned how to ride mountain bikes, developing skills such as level pedals, cornering, modulation of braking, and more. They also spent time on our portable elements, which are challenging but fun once they learn the skills taught by our certified mountain biking instructors.

Also on July 22, we partnered with Duluth Climbing Coalition at their annual summer climbing event, Flock to the Rock, which took place at Ely's Peak. We assisted with transporting gear and gas grills along with providing nine bikes for participants to try out on short, guided group rides.

We have had successful mountain bike sessions with Family Freedom Center and Valley Youth Center throughout the summer, riding with each group once a week for the past two months. Their skill progression has been impressive, allowing them to complete their first 3.2 mile single track ride on the Duluth Traverse, starting and ending at Fairmont Park.

In addition, we joined with Spirit Mountain to offer Share the Shred, a mountain biking program for kids ages 3-13. More than 40 kids attended for group lessons, group rides, and new friendships among families. Another even is scheduled at the end of August.



55+ Programs

In July, the 55+ programs enjoyed two day trips, engaging art classes, as well as active programs such as hiking, yoga, and pickleball. Additionally, we hosted two July BINGO parties – Red, White and BINGO for the Fourth of July as well as a festive Christmas in July BINGO.



PERMITS

PERMIT TYPE	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July
Park & Building Rentals	37	43	69	71	96	178	186
Commercial Operator Permits	3	1	3	7	8	6	2
Busker Permits	0	0	10	1	9	4	6
Alcohol Consumption Permits	2	8	3	9	6	12	18
TOTAL	42	52	85	88	119	200	212

PROJECT UPDATES

Barry Family Memorial Project at Chester Park Playground

In April 2022, the lives of the Barry family – Riana (44), Sean (47), Shiway (12), Sadie (9) – were tragically taken by gun violence. Chester Park was a beloved destination for the Barry family, especially for Shiway and Sadie. Loved ones of the Barry family, in cooperation with City staff, have come together to coordinate a memorial project at the Chester Park playground. Family, friends, and community members raised \$22,000 to support adding a new spinner element and an accessible swing, converting the fall zone from sand to engineered wood fiber, incorporating an accessible pathway to the playground, and installing a memorial bench in remembrance of the Barry family. City staff have begun implementation of the memorial project with the replacement of the playground fall zone. After the playground improvements are completed later this summer a ribbon cutting will be held.

Chester Bowl Bridge

A ribbon cutting was held in partnership with the Chester Bowl Improvement Club (CBIC) on July 10 to celebrate the installation of the new permanent bridge over Chester Creek. The bridge restores year-round access across the creek and improves trail connectivity around Chester Bowl. The project was funded through a Community Development Public Facilities grant, economic development funding from St. Louis County, donations to CBIC, and in-kind support from LHB. The bridge is the first phase of CBIC’s capital improvements to Chester Park, ensuring that future generations continue to have recreation opportunities in the park. CBIC has launched a fundraising campaign, Growing Up Chester, to expand and renovate the Thom Storm Chalet.



Enger Golf Course Renovation

On Monday, June 12, City Council awarded bids for the Enger Golf Course irrigation project, and approved the resolution directing Duluth Golf to operate at least 18 holes at Enger Golf Course during the irrigation construction project in 2024, thus not reopening Lester. Contracts are in place for the following scopes of work: electrical, irrigation, earthwork, and the pumping station. Work will commence for the creation of the new storage pond after Labor Day. Irrigation work is scheduled to start in May of 2024.

The Minnesota DNR has been interested in naturalizing Buckingham Creek and removing connections to ponds in order to improve stream water quality and habitat. The DNR is progressing with design for the Creek’s restoration and is in the process of finalizing funding. The restoration is expected to take place in 2024.

Kitchi Gammi Park (Brighton Beach)

Shoreline construction has been progressing well and park improvements at Kitchi Gammi Park (Brighton Beach) are now underway. The Lakewalk Trail will remain open during construction, and users will be encouraged to stay on trail for the duration of the project and afterwards until the surrounding vegetation has become established. Construction of park amenities and landscape restoration is anticipated to be completed by fall 2023. Brighton Beach road construction is expected to start next summer in 2024. Due to ongoing long-term closures for construction, there will be no events, programming, or reservations allowed at Brighton Beach until fall 2024 at the earliest.



Lakewalk Transportation & Resiliency Improvements

In July, the City of Duluth was awarded an \$8.2 million grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) to rehabilitate the Lakewalk between the Corner of the Lake and 26th Ave E. The scope of the project will include accessibility improvements, including a bypass trail adjacent to Leif Erikson Park, improved wayfinding and connections between downtown and the Lakewalk, coastal revetment, and implementation of eight pause areas. Once the grant is under contract this fall, the final design process will begin.



Lincoln Park

Construction is well underway at Lincoln Park. The park improvement project includes: restoration of the historic stone pavilion with new ADA restroom facilities, playground relocation and replacement, new parking lots, a new nature playscape, new and refurbished picnic pavilions, a new multi-use sport court, accessible trails, and lighting.

Construction is anticipated to last through fall of 2023, with a ribbon cutting and celebration expected to happen in October 2023.



Lincoln Park Stone Pavilion Commemorative Naming

Following the unanimous support from the Parks and Recreation Commission at the June meeting, a resolution was brought to City Council to name the stone pavilion in Lincoln Park in honor of late Duluth City Councilor Renee Van Nett. On Monday, July 24, City Council approved naming the pavilion the “Renee Van Nett Pavilion”.

Cross City Trail

In June, the City of Duluth was awarded a Regional Trail Program grant of \$300,000 through the MN Department of Natural Resources to support extension of the Cross City Trail from 59th Ave W to 61st Ave W. The grant will match a previously awarded grant of \$150,000 from the Federal Recreational Trail Program. The connection between 59th Ave W and Irving Park, where the Cross City Trail currently ends, will be constructed by Engineering with funding from the MN Department of Transportation through the Transportation Alternatives Program in 2024.

Waabizheshikana: The Marten Trail

A community update was provided on June 21 at the Morgan Park Community Center with around 26 attendees coming out for the presentation. The update included a review of upcoming improvements, including presentation of the scope of work, concept designs, and tentative project timelines for improvements to the existing trail, the extension through Blackmer Park, and trailheads.



A copy of the presentation and a map of the planned improvements is available via the project webpage: duluthmn.gov/parks/parks-planning/progress-in-the-park/waabizheshikana-the-marten-trail-segments-0-3/. Thus far, the project has been awarded an array of state and federal grant funding totaling over \$3,673,534 with additional financial support pending. Funding partners include the Greater MN Regional Parks and Trails Commission, Legislative-Citizen Commission on MN Resources, National Park Service and Environmental Protection Agency, MN Historical Society, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Indigenous Women’s Water Sisterhood, and the City of Duluth Parks Fund.

The final design phase has started, and construction is expected to begin in spring of 2024 with completion in 2025. In addition to the infrastructure improvements, there will be new Parks & Recreation programming initiatives and National Water Trail initiatives in partnership with the St. Louis River Alliance.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Hartley Pond and Tischer Creek

The Hartley Pond Feasibility Study is progressing well. A public information session was held in February and additional sessions are expected to be held this summer. The purpose of the Study is to improve the aesthetic value and recreation opportunities in Hartley Park, while also mitigating the temperature and sediment impairments that are negatively impacting downstream trout. The Study will evaluate the feasibility of the proposed options. The findings will then be used by the Parks and Recreation Commission, Natural Resources Commission, and City Council to determine future action. The City is working with the Minnesota DNR for the Study. Concurrently, the City staff are supporting the Minnesota DNR as they develop a Tischer Creek Roadmap to Resilience plan to guide future actions to restore Tischer Creek, and that plan is also progressing well.

Strengthening Coastal Communities Resilience in the Great Lakes Region Challenge Workshop

The Natural Resources Coordinator and a Senior Planner from the Planning & Economic Development department attended a workshop in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in June. Duluth is one of four Great Lakes Communities participating in the Great Lakes Regional Challenge, a program developed and led by the Association of State Floodplain Managers. The purpose of this program, in its inaugural year, is to facilitate the creation of collaborative partnerships between community leaders from four Great Lakes communities to catalyze the implementation of resilience strategies that address unique local challenges and improve the management of coastal resources.

Invasive Species Management

In addition to contracted management, Parks and Recreation staff are coordinating with The Stewardship Network's Duluth Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA) hosted three Garlic Mustard workdays in June and five Wild Parsnip removal workdays in July. In July, CISMA and Hartley Nature Center hosted a Knotweed workshop at the Nature Center to share information about the damage that Knotweed can cause and methods for controlling the plant. CISMA secured funding to establish a volunteer toolshed at Hartley Nature Center to support invasive species volunteers in eastern Duluth. Park Maintenance hosts a toolshed in west Duluth.

PARK MAINTENANCE

The summer season has been chugging along well with a combination of daily operations and special projects. Summer activities have included supporting the annual Rose Fest at the Rose Garden, completing vegetation control in playgrounds through tilling, replacing the home base at Wade Stadium.



2023 Small Park Improvement Projects Supported by Revenue Replacement Funds

In 2022, City revenue replacement funds were dedicated to park improvement projects serving Qualified Census Tracts (QCTs), as defined by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. This summer, Park Maintenance staff installed a number of new picnic tables and benches, some with new concrete slabs. Amenities were installed at Blackmer Park, Cascade Park, Endion Park, Morgan Park, Portland Square, and Washington Center.



Monarch Habitat Planting at Chambers Grove

On July 7, eight Duluth Monarch Buddies volunteers completed supplemental planting of the pollinator meadow at Chambers Grove with 100 Swamp Milkweed and 50 Butterfly Weed plants. Park Maintenance provided planting bars and mowed the meadow ahead of the event. Low mow areas and pollinator meadows in Duluth's park system are mowed seasonally to cut back the woody growth and reduce competition that could otherwise hinder the native plant growth. While planting, volunteers saw a Monarch visit the freshly planted additions and lay eggs.

